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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effects of class size, course level and absenteeism on college student ratings of college faculty teaching performance at a small liberal arts institution, Atlantic Baptist College (New Brunswick, Canada). A rating scale was completed by students in each course offered during the fall semester of the 1993-94 academic year. There were 743 usable evaluations which were analyzed using a statistical software program. A one-way analysis of variance was applied to the data. The analysis evaluated the impact of class size, course level, and student absenteeism in relation to five behavioral dimensions of instructional performance: manner of presentation, classroom/lab management, professional skills, relationship with students, and preparation/planning. Findings for class size were inconsistent but indicated that classroom/lab management, professional skills and relationship with students were significant while manner of presentation and course preparation were not. Course level appeared to be a consistent variable that displayed the greatest effect on student evaluation with students in more advanced courses indicating greater satisfaction with the instructor's performance. Results also consistently showed that, as absenteeism increased, student evaluation of instruction was less favorable. A copy of the instructor evaluation rating scale is attached. (JB)

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ASSESSING FACULTY PERFORMANCE USING THE STUDENT EVALUATION OF INSTRUCTION

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Atlantic Baptist College
June 14, 1994

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ABSTRACT

ASSESSING FACULTY PERFORMANCE USING THE STUDENT EVALUATION OF INSTRUCTION

This study examines the effects of class size, course level and absenteeism on student ratings of teaching performance. Based on findings from a small, liberal arts college, this research concludes that course level has the greatest impact on the following five behavioral components of instructional evaluation: manner of presentation, classroom/lab management, professional skills, relationship with students, and preparation/planning.

Assessing Faculty Performance Using The Student Evaluation of Instruction

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, faculty have been under pressure to publish their research, yet increasingly, it is also expected that they cultivate an equally high standard of instruction. Beltramini, Schlacter, and Kelley (1985) found that both faculty members and administrators assigned high percentages to the importance of teaching performance when making promotion and tenure decisions (teaching was weighted 39-49% of total faculty responsibility). Despite this trend, most graduate schools continue to focus on rigorous research and generally ignore training in pedagogical and andragogical techniques. Because teaching performance is a significant part of faculty's responsibility, it is imperative that opportunities exist to appraise faculty growth and development in the instructional area, as well as in the areas of research activity and service.

The higher education literature promotes the development of an evaluation process that fosters both faculty growth and accountability, and involves faculty in developing and refining the process. It is obvious from the literature that institutional effectiveness and improved student learning will occur if an evaluation process is in place that facilitates continual review and improvement of the teaching/learning process. Because hard times have forced many universities in North America to rethink faculty roles, deep changes are

predicted. DePalma (1992, p.2) challenges educators to rethink basic assumptions, stating:

> Experts say the next few years will bring demands for more administrative and faculty accountability. Legislators in at least three states, North Carolina, South Carolina and Ohio, want legislation to study how hard professors work and how efficiently colleges are run.
>
> Professors will be hard pressed over the next few years to keep their teaching schedules of two or three courses a semester, as legislators turn to community colleges - where professors do little research but teach as many as five courses a semester - as models of efficiency.

State Officials deplore higher education's resistance to change, for example, Goodlad told the annual meeting of the Education Commission of the States that "higher education is going to be in for a bumpy ride in the next decade unless it undertakes fundamental changes." The essence of Goodlad's address to the Commission was that colleges must place a higher value on good teaching on their campuses (Blumenstyk, 1990).

Once it was determined that teaching performance was a significant component of faculty's evaluation portfolio, the question then became "how should teaching performance be evaluated?" Basically, precise information about providing feedback to faculty about their teaching behavior and skills has been ignored in the literature. Many educators believe, however, that a combination of assessment measures should be used, such as peer review, self-evaluation, student evaluation, and supervisory evaluation.

The criteria that is based on the Carnegie Institutional Classification System is undoubtedly the most respected place to look for an answer to the question of how teaching performance should be measured. The Carnegie Institute research uses thirteen types of criteria to evaluate teaching performance: systematic student ratings, chair evaluation, dean evaluation, self-evaluation or report, course syllabi, examinations, handouts, scholarly research and publication, committee evaluation, colleague opinions, classroom visitation, informal student opinions, student examination performance, long-term follow-up of students, and enrolment in elective courses (Traylor, 1992). Of these thirteen criteria, systematic student ratings scored the highest mean (4.60) across all classifications of samples, followed by chair evaluation with a mean of (4.47), and dean evaluation with a mean of (3.92).

The importance of teaching performance in higher education is as much a concern in Canada as it is in the United States. One of the major recommendations made by the most recent report of the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (November, 1993, p.56), reinforced the notion that "quality of teaching is a significant contributor to a student's ability to learn." The Commission acknowledged that the universities in the Maritime region have recently put more focus on teaching and challenges universities to give at least as much weight to teaching as they do to research. The report goes on to note that "while the concept of the teaching portfolio is beginning to be accepted, it

is still not universal. Systematic teaching evaluation by students and peers is also sometimes absent" (p. 58).

The priority recommendation made in the Commission's report was that "peer and student review of teaching quality and the development of teaching portfolios become standard practice at all institutions ..." (p. 58). Once again, it cannot be ignored that students' evaluation of teaching performance is a valuable component in moving post-secondary institutions toward teaching excellence.

A substantial amount of research on validity of student ratings has been carried out since the late 1960's, showing mixed results. Generally, the findings confirm the notion that teachers rated as effective by students are generally those whose students achieve most (MacKeachie, 1986). It must be acknowledged, however, that student ratings of teacher performance have been charged with lacking the minimal properties necessary for performance measurement, lacking in validity, and being highly susceptible to the "halo effect."

Despite these charges, it must be conceded that when questions surface about what instructors do in the classroom, or how they affect students, the students themselves ought to be able to provide credible information. On the other hand, it can be argued that students are not in a position to judge subject-matter competence, which is better left to the instructor's peers and department chairpersons.

Factors Influencing Student Ratings of Teaching

It makes sense that students may learn more and rate teachers higher or lower depending upon certain factors or circumstances. Multiple variables may contribute to misinterpretation of students' ratings. Hopefully, most factors which may invalidate students' rating of instruction have relatively minimal effects when it comes to the overall picture of teaching performance. Nonetheless, the size of the class, whether or not the course is required, the level of the class, student absenteeism, and the subject matter or amount of course content, may all impact students' ratings of teaching performance.

Centra (1979) reports that classes of fifteen and fewer are more effective in producing student learning and that teachers are rated higher by students. Required courses tend to be rated lower than electives. Teacher characteristics may also impact students evaluation of instruction, for example, gender, faculty rank and personality traits. According to McKeachie (1986), research shows that teacher characteristics are only minimally related to student ratings of teaching effectiveness.

Other factors, such as when student ratings are collected, seem not to be a critical variable (Frey, Leonard, and Beatty, 1975). These researchers found that ratings collected the last week of classes were not significantly different from those collected the first week of the following term.

There are many cautions that must be considered when choosing student rating items, especially when personnel decisions, such as promotions, are involved. Some comparisons between instructors in different courses can only be very general; therefore, one should probably not attempt much more than to determine whether students rate an instructor as exemplary, average, or in need of development.

Student ratings of teaching can be valuable, but the purpose or goal of evaluation must be clear. The goals can involve improving teaching, making personnel decisions, aiding student choice of courses and instructors, and stimulating students to think about their education more seriously.

Despite the controversy generated, over time, numerous behavioral observation rating scales have been developed for assessing teacher performance. The intent of this paper is to disseminate recent research findings which are based on students' ratings of faculty performance at Atlantic Baptist College.

Atlantic Baptist College (ABC), is a small, private liberal arts university which is dependent on tuition and student fees for approximately one-half of its operating budget. Understandably, student rating of instruction is one mode of faculty evaluation that is considered vitally important. For the purpose of faculty evaluation, teaching is weighted at forty-five percent, scholarly activity is weighted at thirty-five percent and service is weighted at twenty percent. The Faculty Evaluation Committee does use the faculty portfolio to encourage

faculty dialogue about classroom instruction and to evaluate faculty's teaching performance.

METHODOLOGY

Data Source

The data for this study were obtained through an instructional evaluation instrument administered in each course offered during the fall semester of the 1993-94 academic year at Atlantic Baptist College. The questionnaire consisted of the following behavioral components: manner of presentation, classroom/lab management, professional skills, relationship with students, and preparation/planning (See Appendix A). Each of the five components was operationalized through the use of behavioral indicators drawn from the "effective teaching" research conducted in the 1970's and 1980's. In addition to the behavioral components, the backside of the questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions, dealing primarily with suggestions for improvement. For the purposes of this research, only the objective behavioral components were included in the analysis.

To maximize respondent participation, the evaluation forms were administered by the Vice-President Academic and her assistant during the last three weeks of classes. The instructor of record was absent from the classroom during the evaluation process. When the forms were completed they were returned to the administrator, placed in an envelope and sealed, prior to returning them to the Academic Administrative Office. This procedure yielded 743 useable evaluation forms which were entered

into the MicroCase Analysis System, a statistical software package. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine the data.

Operationalization

This study attempts to determine the impact of three variables on student evaluation of teaching performance. The variables are class size, measured here by the number of evaluations returned per course; course level, gauged by 1000, 2000, 3000, and 4000 designations; and level of student absenteeism as measured by a self-report item on number of absences during the semester (0, 1-5, more than 5). Each of these three variables was examined in relation to the five behavioral dimensions of instructional performance - manner of presentation, classroom/lab management, professional skills, relationship with students and preparation/planning.

The correlations between the empirical indicators for each of the five behavioral dimensions were examined with view to the creation of an index for each dimension. All inter-item correlations (Pearson r) exhibited a coefficient of .40 or above and were statistically significant at the .01 level, supporting the summing of each dimension's indicators into an index.

FINDINGS

The results of the data analysis exhibited in Tables 1-5 present means and standard deviations for each of the five component indices, for the entire sample and each category of class size, course level and degree of student absenteeism.

Additionally, the F-values and their level of significance are displayed, enabling an assessment of differences between means of the categories of the independent variable for each component index.

With respect to the first component, student evaluation of manner of instructor presentation, the difference in means

Table 1. Class Size, Course Level and Absenteeism by Manner of Presentation Index

	(N)	Mean	Standard Deviation
All	(743)	3.26	.72
Class Size			
10<	(149)	3.29	.71
11-15	(122)	3.17	.69
16-30	(153)	3.39	.80
31-40	(176)	3.15	.76
41+	(143)	3.30	.61
			F = 1.98
Course Level			
1000	(382)	3.07	.76
2000	(199)	3.42	.63
3000	(130)	3.45	.61
4000	(32)	3.84	.37
			F = 24.33***
Absenteeism			
0	(230)	3.39	.71
1-5	(432)	3.22	.71
6+	(38)	2.82	.90
			F = 11.37***

P< .05*
P< .01**
P< .001***

between the categories of class size does not achieve an acceptable level of statistical significance. However, the highest mean evaluation comes from the 16-30 category of class size (3.39), followed by the 41 and over (3.30), and 10 or less (3.29). Examining course level, Table 1 does show that it is significantly related to student evaluation ($F=24.33$, $p<.001$). The 1000 level courses have the lowest mean (3.07) and the 4000 courses have the highest (3.84). Concerning absenteeism, the results show that as the number of absences increase the mean for the manner of presentation decreases ($F=11.37$, $p<.001$).

Table 2 displays results for evaluation of classroom/lab management. Here, the relationship between class size and student evaluation is significant ($F=9.27$, $p<.001$). Although each additional increase in class size does not yield a less satisfactory evaluation, classes with ten or less students do show the most positive evaluation (3.28), while a class size of 41 or more produces the most negative evaluation (2.91).
On the matter of course level, the pattern revealed in Table 1 is mirrored in Table 2 for classroom/lab management. The between level variation is significant and large ($F=23.16$, $p<.001$). As course level advances the mean level of satisfaction with classroom/lab management increases. Absenteeism also shows a significant difference between the category means ($F=6.80$, $p<.01$), as the lowest mean score (2.68) occurs among students who are absent from six or more classes and the highest evaluation of

classroom management is offered by those who miss no classes (3.20).

Table 2. Class Size, Course Level and Absenteeism by Classroom/Lab Management Index

	(N)	Mean	Standard Deviation
All	(743)	3.11	.80
Class Size			
10<	(149)	3.28	.75
11-15	(122)	3.12	.80
16-30	(153)	3.25	.80
31-40	(176)	3.01	.82
41+	(143)	2.91	.75
			F = 9.27***
Course Level			
1000	(382)	2.91	.84
2000	(199)	3.23	.70
3000	(130)	3.42	.66
4000	(32)	3.66	.55
			F = 23.16***
Absenteeism			
0	(230)	3.20	.77
1-5	(432)	3.12	.80
6+	(38)	2.68	.87
			F = 6.80**

P< .05*
P< .01**
P< .001***

In Table 3, the findings demonstrate the importance of course level to the explanation of student evaluation scores on the professional skills index. All three variables have have significant F-values, indicating that the between category

variation is substantially greater than the variation within the categories of class size, course level and absenteeism. For class size, the highest mean score is found in the 16-30 category

Table 3. Class Size, Course Level and Absenteeism by Professional Skills Index

	(N)	Mean	Standard Deviation
All	(743)	3.13	.82
Class Size			
10<	(149)	3.16	.78
11-15	(122)	3.11	.87
16-30	(153)	3.34	.78
31-40	(176)	3.03	.82
41+	(143)	3.01	.81
		F = 4.17**	
Course Level			
1000	(382)	2.92	.83
2000	(199)	3.36	.75
3000	(130)	3.30	.74
4000	(32)	3.50	.72
		F = 19.21***	
Absenteeism			
0	(230)	3.26	.77
1-5	(432)	3.09	.83
6+	(38)	2.76	.82
		F = 7.39**	

P< .05*
P< .01**
P< .001***

(3.34) and the lowest in those classes with 31-40 (3.03) or 41+ (3.01) students (F=4.17, p<.01). Course level once again demonstrates large mean differences between categories (F=19.21, p<.001), as the 1000 level has the lowest mean evaluation (2.92)

and the 4000 level the highest (3.50). Absenteeism also proves to be significantly related to student evaluation ($F=7.39$, $p<.01$), as those with no absences evaluate instructor professional skills most favourably (3.26) and students with six or more absences least favourably (2.76).

Findings for the index summarizing instructors relationship with students (Table 4), displays that the class size of 16-30

Table 4. Class Size, Course Level and Absenteeism by Relationship with Student's Index

	(N)	Mean	Standard Deviation
All	(743)	3.25	.80
Class Size			
10<	(149)	3.36	.75
11-15	(122)	3.35	.73
16-30	(153)	3.44	.69
31-40	(176)	3.22	.84
41+	(143)	2.88	.84
			F = 13.13***
Course Level			
1000	(382)	3.01	.84
2000	(199)	3.37	.74
3000	(130)	3.66	.51
4000	(32)	3.78	.42
			F = 33.27***
Absenteeism			
0	(230)	3.31	.78
1-5	(432)	3.26	.80
6+	(38)	2.89	.83
			F = 4.46*

P< .05*
P< .01**
P< .001***

has the highest mean evaluation (3.44). The lowest evaluation is offered by those in the largest classes (2.88). These differences are significant and allow us to reject the null hypothesis of no difference between group means ($F=13.13$, $p<.001$). Likewise, means for course level are highly significant ($F=33.27$, $p<.001$) and exhibit a clear pattern, that is, as course level advances the students evaluation of instructor relational qualities also increases.

Of all the indices, the results presented in Table 5 for course preparation and planning show the lowest F-values for the three explanatory variables. Class size does not reach an acceptable level of significance and there is little difference between the size categories ($F=1.311$). Course level is significant at the .01 level ($F=4.85$) and the most favourable evaluation occurs in the 4000 level category (3.63), while the least favourable is found among students in 1000 level courses (3.32). Absenteeism is also significant ($F=3.03$, $p<.05$), but the mean differences between the categories are small. Nonetheless, the overall pattern for the other indices is paralleled for absenteeism on the course preparation index, as those with no absences have the highest mean evaluation (3.49) and those with the most absences exhibit the lowest mean (3.24).

Table 5. Class Size, Course Level and Absenteeism by Course Preparation and Planning Index

	(N)	Mean	Standard Deviation
All	(743)	3.41	.75
Class Size			
10<	(149)	3.42	.75
11-15	(122)	3.35	.75
16-30	(153)	3.48	.74
31-40	(176)	3.38	.75
41+	(143)	3.41	.74
			F = 1.311
Course Level			
1000	(382)	3.32	.79
2000	(199)	3.54	.66
3000	(130)	3.40	.73
4000	(32)	3.63	.61
			F = 4.85**
Absenteeism			
0	(230)	3.49	.65
1-5	(432)	3.36	.78
6+	(38)	3.24	.94
			F = 3.03*

P< .05*
P< .01**
P< .001***

DISCUSSION

Class Size

Overall, findings for class size exhibit an inconsistent pattern; as classroom/lab management, professional skills and relationship with students are significant, while manner of presentation and course preparation/planning are not. It would appear from our findings that the optimal class size may be 16-30

students. This bears negatively on previous research findings that indicate as class size increases, student evaluation of teaching performance declines (Centra, 1979).

Conceivably, larger classes do not allow for such activities as adequate individualized attention, mentoring, peer interaction and student initiated discussion. For example, class sizes over 40 are not as conducive for transmitting excitement for the discipline, because mentoring relationships are more difficult to establish. On the other hand, classes with less than ten students may allow for individualized instruction and the establishment of rapport; however, this may also cultivate a threatening learning environment for those not comfortable with active participation. Potentially, class sizes of 16-30 appear to provide optimal learning environments as it allows for diversity of learning styles and teaching approaches. Possibly, greater diversity of learning styles allows for the realization of individual student goals in the mid-sized class. However, where an optimal class size is not possible, instructors should employ a variety of teaching techniques and evaluation modalities.

Course Level

Interestingly, in our study, course level is consistently the variable in the analysis that displays the greatest affect on the dimensions of student evaluation. This finding tends to run counter to research concluding that course level is among the variables that have little impact upon student evaluation of

teaching performance (McKeachie, 1986). In this study, as course level increases, satisfaction with instructor's performance also increases. This is understandable, in that, 1000 level courses are introductory, larger in size, may be core requirements and should provide opportunities for students to develop substantive areas of learning. All of these factors may contribute to lower evaluation scores, although, as previously noted, class size alone does not account for the differences. Conversely, in upper level courses: students are older, more totally immersed in their discipline, have been exposed to a variety of teaching styles, more fully appreciate the complexity of the classroom experience, and are more serious about accomplishing their educational goals.

Regression analyses (not shown) reveals that course level has the largest beta coefficient of the three independent variables for all three indices. This indicates that the relative weight of course level is greater than that of class size and absenteeism after controlling for the effects of each of the independent variables.

Absenteeism

Consistently, our findings have exhibited that as absenteeism increases, student evaluation of instruction becomes less favourable on all dimensions. Hypothetically, this trend may be circular in its development, in that, an initial poor evaluation of the student may lead to demoralization and absenteeism, which then impacts student rating of instruction.

One implication of the findings on absenteeism is that learning should be a joint responsibility of students and instructors. Students have to take responsibility for attaining their own educational goals by attending class regularly. Moreover, our research demonstrates the importance of assessing absenteeism as a predictor of student's evaluation of instruction.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we have noted the relative importance of three variables - class size, course level and absenteeism, on instructional evaluation. It must, however, be acknowledged that other factors impinge upon student evaluation of instruction, for example, discipline of study, gender, age and student achievement. These are factors that need to be attended to in future research.

Student ratings of teacher performance may be useful for several purposes, such as: providing data for improving teaching and evaluating faculty performance; aiding student choice of courses and professors; and, stimulating students to think about their education. However, certain cautions need to be considered regarding student ratings of teaching. First, their use can negatively impact education if they generate anxiety or conflict on the part of faculty or students. Second, student ratings should only be used in conjunction with multiple measures of faculty performance. Third, when student evaluation of instruction is used to compare between teachers or one

instructors performance in different courses, the results should be interpreted across similar course levels, and, where appropriate, class sizes. The use of an aggregate institutional mean for performance evaluations, even when the components of evaluation are specified, appears to have limited value for accurate assessment. Even though research on student evaluation of instruction has shown disparate findings, the value of future research into this area is paramount.

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INSTRUCTIONAL EVALUATION APPENDIX A

Course Name and Number: _____ Professor: _____

Year: 19
_____ 93
_____ 94
_____ 94
_____ 95

Session
_____ Fall
_____ Winter

Approximate number of your days absent from this class.
_____ 0
_____ 1 - 5
_____ More than 5

EVALUATION SCALE
4.0 = Excellent
3.0 = Good
2.0 = Average
1.0 = Poor
.0 = Unacceptable
NA = Not Applicable

Evaluation Example:
(circle one per line only)
4.0 3.0 2.0 1.0 .0 NA

A.	Manner of Presentation:					
	Speaks clearly and with appropriate volume	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	.0	NA
	Interested and enthusiastic about teaching and about subject matter	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	.0	NA
	Poised and self-confident	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	.0	NA
	Ability to maintain student cooperation and attention	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	.0	NA
	Uses a variety of media and activities in class	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	.0	NA
B.	Classroom/Lab Management					
	Resourcefulness-ability to meet unexpected situations	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	.0	NA
	Establish student relationships which facilitate learning	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	.0	NA
	Encourage students questions and comments during class time	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	.0	NA
	Gives constructive and clearly stated answers	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	.0	NA
	Emphasizes basic concepts	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	.0	NA
C.	Professional Skills;					
	States objective(s) for each class session	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	.0	NA
	Ability to make classroom/lab work interesting	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	.0	NA
	Fairness in assigning classroom/lab work	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	.0	NA
	Clearly states course grading criteria	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	.0	NA
D.	Relationship with Students:					
	Genuine interest in students as learners	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	.0	NA
	Provisions for individual differences	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	.0	NA
	Ability to make students feel secure and at ease	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	.0	NA
	Courteousness, friendliness, respect for you as a person	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	.0	NA
	Available for consultations when needed/requested	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	.0	NA
E.	Preparation - Planning					
	Provided a detailed course syllabus	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	.0	NA
	Stated course objectives; as a whole	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	.0	NA
	Indicated course requirements at beginning of class?	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	.0	NA
	Tests, essays, or assignments were clearly defined	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	.0	NA

INSTRUCTIONAL EVALUATION form (continued)

F. What do you especially like about this professor as your teacher?

G. How could this professor improve?

H. What suggestions do you have for improving the course, if any?

I. Would you take another class from this professor and why?